

Time to make a decision on Library Square, says Council

By Brock Weir

After twelve years, nearly 30 reports, and up to 10 invitations for the public to weigh in on the matter, now is the time to finally make a decision on the future of Library Square, according to Council.

Library Square, a large swath of land on Victoria Street currently occupied by the former homes of the Aurora Public Library and Aurora Seniors' Centre, has been a question mark in the community for well over a decade. To some members of the public they are buildings occupying land that should be used to alleviate downtown parking problems while others believe they should be replaced with a new, modern facility. Public information suggestions have collected no shortage of ideas on what to do with the site, but now is the time to take action on these suggestions.

Council's decision to move forward on making a decision on the land, meetings which could take place as early as August, came on the heels of a motion from Councillor John Abel to establish an ad-hoc committee comprised of some members of staff, members of the public and other stakeholders, to spur some action. Such a committee, he said, would start engaging the community on what they would like to see.

"We need time and time at the beginning of the term is of the essence, in my mind, before we get to another budget and preoccupy ourselves for seven months," said Councillor Abel.

In the view of other members of Council, more than enough consultation with the public has already taken place over the last 12 years, and it is Council's job to take a serious look at their suggestions.

"I think we have had a lot of citizen input in all our reports previously, lots of studies and recommendations and I think for us to move forward with all the creative suggestions and ideas [we should do so] as an entire Council and perhaps set up some work sessions focusing on Library Square and what each of us feel would be an appropriate vision and come up with an alignment of that idea we can all be proud of," said Councillor Sandra Humfries.

A similar view was offered by Councillors Michael Thompson and Wendy Gaertner, who said since 2013 public consultation has been done "over and over." Responding to Councillor Abel's comment that Library Square was a "major election issue" last fall, Councillor Thompson said he didn't disagree, but a further committee to hash out these ideas is not the right way forward.

"If you look back on all the different reports, there were some 30 ideas of what could and could not be in Library Square," said Councillor Thompson. "My preference is to call a special Council meeting, go through the reports, talk about the components that have to be in Library Square to help with the revitalization of downtown to springboard the promenade plan, and then start moving forward to get a concept drawing before going out to the public with a vision.

"We have had so much engagement with the community [and] I honestly believe we don't need another ad-hoc committee. We need action and decision-making on this issue so we can move forward now."

Added Councillor Gaertner: "I made a submission to John West to have an ad-hoc committee about Library Square to try and make a youth component in that area. That was an extensive process under Mayor West and we are still nowhere. It is time for Council to step up."

For Mayor Geoff Dawe, getting to the task at hand would be ideal for later this summer to allow some time for new Councillors to get up to speed on the issue and get a sense of how they can move forward together with all the information that has been collected so far.

"I remember being on the other side of the table when I was on the Library Board and there was a great consternation on this side

when I suggested tearing down the old library and seniors' centre because, strangely enough, parking was an issue back then as well,? said Mayor Dawe. ? I think a lot of people have had input over a long time but we need to make sure as a Council [have enough time] to look at the reports which have been made over the last 12 ? 15 years, have some discussions with [staff] and use this as an opportunity over July to do this [and discuss no later] than August.?